

HOW SCOGIN SOLD POWDER TO KILL FLEAS

“Scogin divers times did lacke money, and could not tell what shift to make. At last, he thought to play the physician, and did fill a box full of the powder of a rotten post; and on a Sunday he went to a Parish Church, and told the wives that hee had a powder to kill up all the fleas in the country, and every wife bought a pennyworth; and Scogin went his way, ere Masse was done. The wives went home, and cast the powder into their beds and in their chambers, and fleas continued still. On a time, Scogin came to the same Church on a Sunday, and when the wives had espied him, the one said to the other; this is he that deceived us with the powder to kill fleas; see, said the one to the other, this is the selfe-same person. When Masse was done, the wives gathered about Scogin, and said: you be an honest man to deceive us with the powder to kill fleas. Why, said Scogin, are not your fleas all dead? We have more now (said they) than ever we had. I marvell of that, said Scogin, I am sure you did not use the medicine as you should have done. They said: wee did cast it in our beds and in our chambers. Said he, there be a sort of foole that will buy a thing, and will not aske what they should doe with it. I tell you all, that you should have taken every flea by the neck, and then they would gape; and then you should have cast a little of the powder into every flea’s mouth, and so you should have killed them all. Then, said the wives: we have not onely lost our money, but we are mocked for our labour.” The above is one of the stories in “Scogins Jests,” London, 1626. An earlier edition was published in 1565–6. The collection of jests was “Full of Witty Mirth and Pleasant Shifts” and was a “Preservative against Melancholy” according to the title page.—H. B. W.